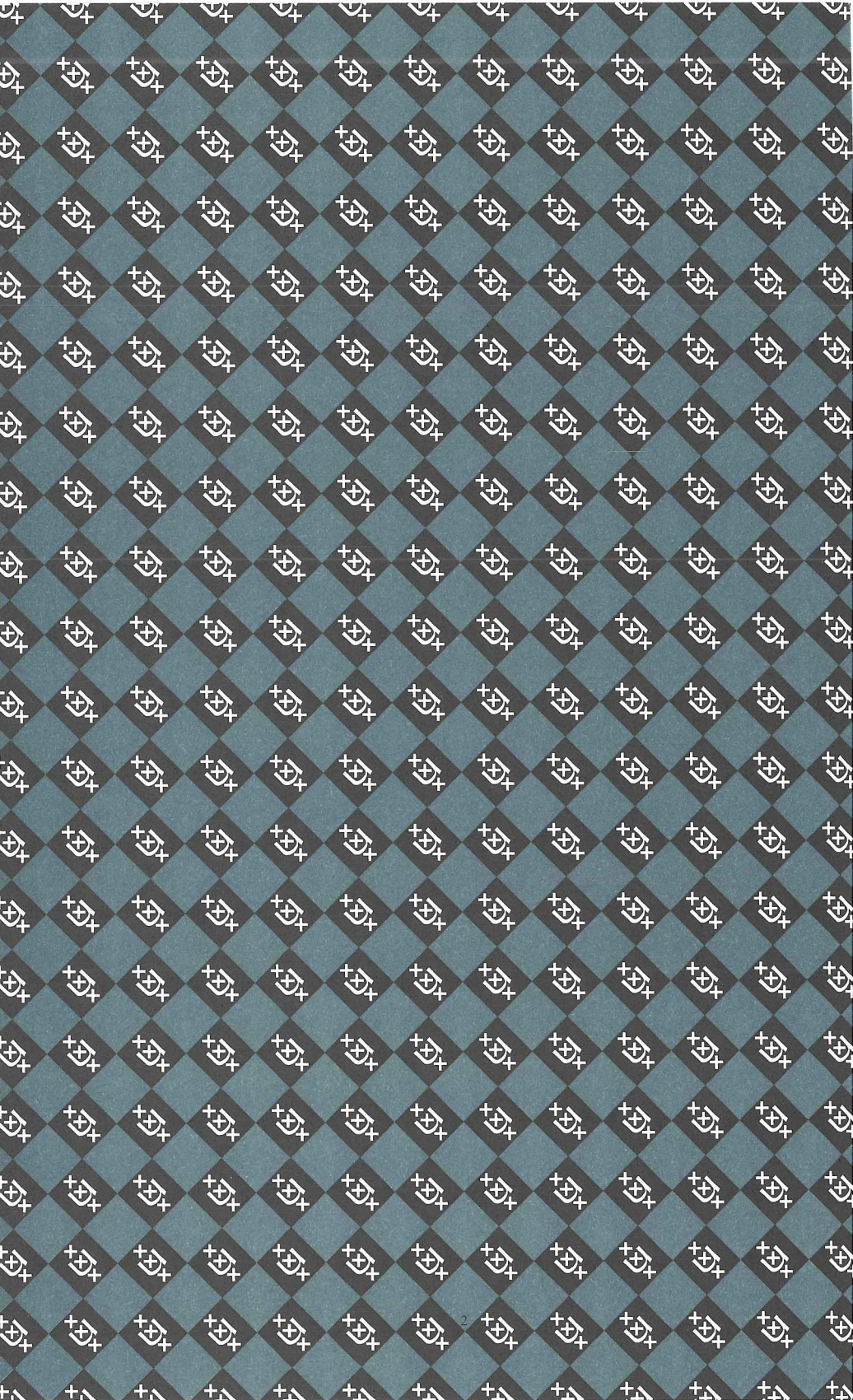


*Monarchy, Orangism,
and Republicanism in the
Later Dutch Golden Age*

JONATHAN ISRAEL

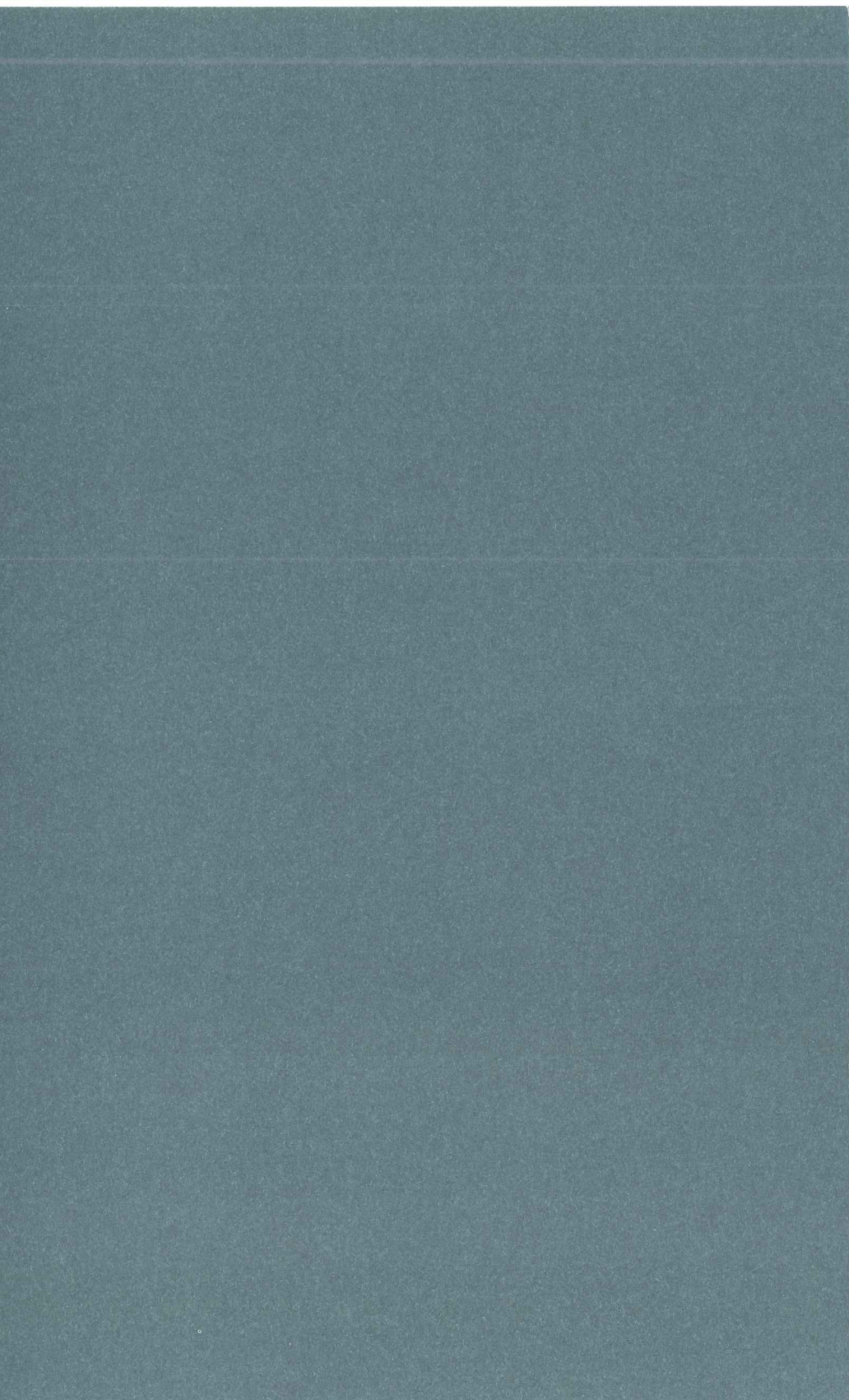


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in the Later Dutch Golden Age*

Second Golden Age Lecture

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by Jonathan Israel



In the years since the many affinities linking the political ideas of the Brothers De la Court with those of Spinoza – and Spinoza's extensive use of the writings of the De la Courts in formulating his own political philosophy¹ – first began to be emphasized, in the 1960s and 1970s, especially by Ernst Kossmann and Eco Haitsma Mulier, the works of these three late seventeenth-century writers have been seen as forming the core of what is important and original from a wider European perspective in Dutch Golden Age republican political thought.² It is, furthermore, as Kossmann remarks, a corpus of theory which contrasts in crucial respects with what J.G.A. Pocock has so influentially dubbed the 'Atlantic republican tradition', a body of thought which, however, in reality, is not 'Atlantic' at all but, rather, specifically the Anglo-American classical republican tradition.

Pocock persuasively characterized this tradition as the republicanism of an opposition-minded gentry – agrarian, anti-commercial, asserting the special status of free property-holders and the duty of the citizenry to participate in government; it was grounded, he held, 'on the Machiavellian theory of the possession of arms as necessary to political personality'.³ Hence in Harringtonian republicanism and what Pocock terms 'English Machiavellism', the ties between land, republican freedom and the bearing of arms becomes fundamental: 'as in Machiavelli, the bearing of arms is the primary medium through which the individual asserts both his social power and his participation in politics as a responsible moral being: but the possession of land in nondependent tenure is now the material basis for the bearing of arms'.⁴ It is a syndrome characteristic of a broad tradition in English political ideas which, however, has relatively few real links with the neighbouring Dutch context.

Dutch seventeenth-century republicanism, by contrast, even though drawing on some of the same sources as the English variety, and no less steeped in Machiavelli, seemingly sprang from a different social base and developed intellectually in a somewhat different direction. In view of the existing historiography, one might not think this particularly important in the wider European and global context since hitherto very few, if any, general discussions of seventeenth and early eighteenth-century political thought in English, French, Italian or German assign much weight to Dutch influences in the wider picture. In fact, most of the historiography, in all these languages, simply assumes that the so-called 'Atlantic' republicanism of the English gentry is far and away the leading and presiding tradition in post-Renaissance western republicanism as a whole, much as Locke and Early Enlightenment English liberalism are seen as the foundation of the Atlantic liberal tradition as a whole. This would then also fit with the wider view which has gained currency in recent years that the

western Enlightenment as a whole has its roots essentially in British science, philosophy, theology and social thought.⁵

But there are grounds for calling this now increasingly familiar stance into question and for claiming, in opposition to it, that the general tendency in history of political thought, when searching for the roots of modernity to focus heavily on the Anglo-American republican tradition and to screen out, or marginalize, the De la Courts and Spinoza as well as Van den Enden, Koerbagh, Walten, Van Leenhof, Jean-Frédéric Bernard and other Dutch and Dutch Huguenot political writers, is not just an error but entirely devastating to any proper understanding of the emergence of modern democratic republicanism.

To begin with, while English republicanism was that of a landed gentry, and rarely strongly democratic in tendency, Dutch and Dutch Huguenot republicanism was plainly not the ideology of a rural elite, aspiring to dominate a national parliament, but rather of city burghers whose interests were commercial and non-agrarian. Thus it was distinctively 'modern' in a sense in which no other European republicanism of the seventeenth century can claim to have been. Then, in the second place, since agrarian interests in Dutch political thought remained wholly subordinate to urban trade and industry, the implicit basis of social hierarchy inherent in much English classical republicanism (in contrast to Locke – from whence Jefferson derived his principle of the self-evident 'equality' of all men)⁶ is replaced, arguably with wide-ranging implications for the later Enlightenment, with theories of equality which effectively classify all those who are not dependent on others – that is who are not women, children and servants – into a single category of 'citizen'. Indeed, in one of the most forceful of the texts discussed in this essay, the *Vrije Politieke Stellingen* (Free Political Institutions) of 1665, by the atheistic schoolmaster Franciscus van den Enden (1602-74), we find one of the earliest general statements of the common rationality and fundamental equality of all men – of whatever race, colour or creed.⁷ At bottom it was a republicanism which pivoted on the idea of the 'common good' in the civic sphere envisioning merchants and wage-earners as the backbone of the citizenry.

Third, and no less vital than the stress on equality and the civic context, Dutch republicanism was philosophically far more radical, and more coherently radical, than English republicanism, or to put it more precisely its 'Spinozist' wing tended to be more sophisticated and developed philosophically than the English republican tradition. This has nothing to do with innate national tastes or aptitudes but with circumstances. Being at once more emphatically anti-monarchical, anti-hierarchical and more concerned with equality than English republicanism, the Dutch tradition simply needed more and better arguments for rejecting the prevailing



Pieter de la Court, *Only in a Republic are True Peace and Happiness to be experienced* (Leiden and Rotterdam, 1669) UB Amsterdam

hierarchical vision of society generally prevalent in Baroque Europe with its built-in stress on princely authority, aristocratic values, and ecclesiastical authority. The fact that the United Provinces was a republic created by a long and bloody revolt against a legitimate monarch, an originally *de facto* republic which, in the 1580s, had gradually abjured monarchy in principle as well as fact, and which had no real state church on the model of the Church of England, while post-1688 England was a parliamentary monarchy, managed by a landed aristocracy with an established church which revered the monarch as its head, meant that the frameworks within which the rival traditions of republicanism evolved differed substantially from the outset. Furthermore, where English compromise produced an increasingly stable balance between king and Parliament which encouraged a stress in eighteenth-century British culture on the uniqueness and singularity of the British model, the elimination of monarchy, aristocracy and a state church in the Dutch model (until the reaction against the French Revolution and radical ideas including democracy and republicanism during the early nineteenth century) encouraged a more philosophical, generalized approach which by the 1750s had been taken up by the French republicanism of Boulanger, Mably, Diderot, Condorcet and, in some respects, Rousseau. It was this Dutch-French line of development, arguably, and not the English tradition which – despite having been largely submerged in histories of western political thought – constitutes the main line in the emergence of modern western democratic republicanism.

Whereas eighteenth-century English, and some pre-1789 anglophile continental political thought, notably Montesquieu, sees limited monarchy on the British model as the ideal, limited monarchy as such exerted comparatively little attraction either on Dutch republicans or indeed the French Radical Enlightenment after Montesquieu. As Kossmann remarks, the De la Courts deemed ‘Harrington’s ideal state of a *regnum mixtum* with a monarch deprived of absolute power’ thoroughly undesirable and inherently ‘unstable as well as continually in danger of degenerating into despotic monarchy’.⁸ Spinoza considered the English revolution of the 1640s not just defective but a total failure in which – while attempting to get rid of their despotic king – the English had merely substituted, in the person of Cromwell, another and worse ‘monarch’, under another name.⁹ Admittedly, in his late treatise, the *Tractatus Politicus*, Spinoza allows that monarchy is redeemable up to a point. But this is only where and when it can be made substantially to approximate to democracy – and hence to share in democracy’s strengths and advantages. In indicating how this should be done, he so utterly emasculates government by kings that what survives is little more than a caricature. The perfect monarchy, he suggests (doubtless tongue in cheek), is constitutional monarchy on the

model of the old kingdom of Aragon before it was subverted by the despot Philip III!¹⁰ Nor were the Dutch radical writers who came after Spinoza any less negative or sarcastic about kings, princely power, and the monarchical principle. Ericus Walten (1663-97), a friend of the engraver Romeyn de Hooghe who participated as a propagandist on the side of William III in the Glorious Revolution in 1688-89 and whose radical inclinations became increasingly evident subsequently, during the early 1690s,¹¹ dismisses monarchy in his Orangist tracts written during the Glorious Revolution of 1688-91 as always, universally and inherently inferior to republics:

...so dat niet alleen alle Absolute Macht, die oit eenig Monarch geoefend heeft [he declared in 1689, in support of William III's and the States General's invasion of England] ge-usurpeerd en tegen de fundamentale wetten van hare regeringe strydig is, maar de Monarchiale regeringe ook tegen Gods oogmerk is, voornamelijk alse sig verтоond in de gedaante van een souveraine magt in een mensch alleen, als God en de Natuur de souveraine magt in een hele vergaderinge van menschen geplaatst hebben.

(So that not only has all absolute power which any monarch has ever exercised been usurped, in violation of the fundamental laws of the state, but monarchical government itself is against God's intention, especially when exercised in the form of a sovereign power in one person alone, since God and Nature have lodged the sovereign power in an entire assembly of men.)¹²

However, as Kossmann emphasizes, despite the impressive vitality and originality of Dutch republican political ideas during the late seventeenth century, from the perspective of the later Enlightenment, 'Dutch republican theory did not, so it seems, draw inspiration from its own intellectual past' so that the late seventeenth-century corpus of theory 'never developed, as far as I can see, into a peculiarly Dutch intellectual tradition which it would be correct to define as the Dutch paradigm'.¹³

Yet while Kossmann's contention is undoubtedly correct regarding the mainstream, moderate Dutch Enlightenment, it arguably misses the point regarding the wider context. For it is precisely the exceptionally radical character of the ideas of the De la Courts and Spinoza – as well as Van den Enden, Walten, Van Leenhof and some others, which segregates what is most striking, original and significant in late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century Dutch political thought from the moderate, mainstream Enlightenment, including eighteenth-century Dutch Orangism with its increasingly conservative tendency.

If one focuses, therefore, not at the moderate mainstream whether Dutch, British or French but instead on the radical underground – and not only in the Netherlands, where the more radical elements of the pre-Revolutionary *Patriottenbeweging* of the 1780s made no secret of their admiration for the theories of the De la Courts while at the same time seeing themselves (and being regarded by their opponents) as adherents of a broad European philosophical radicalism¹⁴ – one is presented with a completely different picture. For the ‘Spinozist’ tradition which to a greater or lesser extent gained ground everywhere in the early and mid eighteenth century, eventually, in the later eighteenth century, matured into the revolutionary ‘philosophical’ radicalism with strong republican leanings, of Boulanger, Mably, Morelly, Diderot and Condorcet. Regarded then in this light, it seems that the political thought of the De la Courts and Spinoza was not after all a dead-end, or abortive endeavour, but rather, in the broader European context, actually the main strand of western republican political theory of early modern times, the strand which was transformed ultimately into Jacobinism, and which after 1789 attempted to eradicate monarchy, social hierarchy and priesthood by revolution.

By the 1690s then there were disciples of Spinoza not just attempting but in some measure succeeding in transforming aspects of Dutch urban popular culture. If propagating Spinoza’s ideas by distributing his books or reworking his texts was firmly banned by decree of the States of Holland and States General in the United Provinces after 1678, there were also more generalized forms of radical expression which clearly had a very wide impact, albeit if broadcast too indiscreetly had every likelihood of landing one not just in trouble but in prison and, as in the case of Ericus Walten¹⁵ – leading to a miserable end, at an early age. Walten, an Orangist and leading anti-absolutist publicist of the Glorious Revolution,¹⁶ whose life ended in his prison cell at The Hague, in June 1697, at only thirty-four years of age, most probably by suicide,¹⁷ was an impulsive, highly strung personality, given to venting dissident views which he thought many others in Dutch society actually shared in private but he alone, he believed, was bold enough to declare uninhibitedly and relentlessly in print.

Walten evidently already revealed radical tendencies well before his involvement in the Bekker controversies in the years 1691-4,¹⁸ as indeed did his equally unconventional (much older) friend and collaborator, the engraver Romeyn de Hooghe (c. 1645-1708) who besides being one of the greatest artists of the later Dutch Golden Age, an ingenious inventor (of cotton printing among other things) and, like Walten, an Orangist propagandist, also enjoyed notoriety as a freethinker, political intriguer, ‘abominable’ blasphemer and purveyor of pornographic prints.¹⁹ More

De
REGTSINNIGE POLICEY;
Of een nauwkeurig Vertoog van de
MAGT en PLIGT
Der
KONINGEN.

Waar in uit alle *Goddelyke, Natuurlyke en Burgerlyke Wet-*
ten de eerste opkomst van de *Magistratuur, Koninklyke-*
en Vorstelyke Regeringe aangewesen, en getoond word, hoe-
danig de *Overigheden, Koningen, Vorsten* en andere *Regenten*
moeten gequalificeerd zijn; hoe verre de *Onderdanen* gehou-
den zijn hare *Overigheden* te *gehoorsamen*, en op wat gronden
het voor de *Onderdanen* *ge-oorloft* en *noodzakelyk* is, om de
Regenten te *wederstaan*, en 't gene daar *God* en de *Natuur* haar
Meester van gemaakt hebben, te *beschermen*.

Door
ERICUS WALTEN.



In 's GRAVENHAGE,
By MEINDERT UITWERF, Boekverkoper in
de Halstraat. 1689.

Ericus Walten, *Discourse on the might and duties of monarchs*
(The Hague, 1689) UB Amsterdam

specifically, De Hooghe was accused of being contemptuous of Scripture, considering the Gospel of John just 'dreams', and 'preaching' atheism in Amsterdam coffee-houses. He reportedly considered everything people believe about the immortality of the soul and resurrection of the dead to be nothing but deception and madness, death being death.²⁰ De Hooghe was also accused of being a hardened hedonist and sexual libertine who supposedly prostituted his own wife, to Jews as well as Christians.²¹

Whatever the truth of that, it is certain from his own later work that while a supporter of William III and on the worst terms with the Amsterdam regent oligarchy, he nevertheless, like Walten, nurtured strongly republican views and was robustly proud of the egalitarian, federal, anti-aristocratic and non-monarchical character of the Dutch Republic, expressing contempt for aristocratic republics such as Poland and Venice as places where the common people were kept down too much and 'the peasants scarcely considered to be people'.²² In one of his biting criticisms of the Amsterdam city government, he suggests that in their *coup d'état* of 1650, following the death of Prince William II, when they set aside the stadholderate, the Amsterdam burgomasters and regents had sought mastery over the rest of the United Provinces: 'they wanted to be Venice' and the top families to set themselves up as *signori* and *cavallieri* over the common burghers.²³ Apart from the United Provinces, he admired, among contemporary states, only Switzerland as 'een allervryste Volks regeering van veele leden' (a fully free people's government of many members).²⁴ Like Walten's, his hostility to the Amsterdam (and Rotterdam) city government appears to have been part of a wider, principled dislike of oligarchy.

Meanwhile, Walten, an audacious propagator of radical ideas, in some respects reminiscent of Koerbagh, was in the embattled political, philosophical and theological context of the 1690s, as he himself was proudly aware, a uniquely if recklessly outspoken, as well as decried and vulnerable figure.²⁵ His intellectual radicalism showed in various contexts including support for a comprehensive toleration,²⁶ and his opinions about the character and origin of political power which clearly show that he, like De Hooghe, managed to combine democratic republicanism with Orangism in a new rather remarkable way.²⁷ At the same time, he mounted a fierce one-man campaign against the anti-Cartesian (and anti-Cocceian) Reformed preachers Leonardus Rijssenius (at Heusden), Wilhelmus a Brakel (at Rotterdam), and Jacobus Koelman, as well as the pugnacious The Hague sick-comforter, Jacobus Schuts (who had previously crossed swords with the Spinozist logician Petrus van Balen), for their views on the governance of the public church. Against them, Walten insisted on the unqualified subordination of the ecclesiastical arm to the secular power.²⁸

Where for these churchmen ecclesiastical authority remained in some sense an independent entity, Walten urged the complete eradication of all ecclesiastical authority which is autonomous and beyond the will of the state as determined by the majority of the people; indeed, he strove to discredit the theological conception on which both royal absolutism and ecclesiastical authority rested, refusing to accept that 'de koningen en andere overheden hare magt onmiddelijk van God ontfangen' (kings and other rulers receive their power directly from God).²⁹ He denied that the resolutions or ordinances of any ecclesiastical body, or inauguration of any clergy, possess validity unless they convene on the orders, and under the auspices of the civil government which in turn, as in De Hooghe, derives legitimacy only from the will of the people. As for the peculiarly Dutch phenomenon of widespread religious dissent, he contended that until the Almighty changes things, the state and therefore the ecclesiastical authorities must accept 'dat het een wesentlijk regt van de mensche-lijke natuur is, dat een ieder God diend na sijn eigene overtuiging' (that it is an essential right of human nature that each person should serve God according to his own conviction).³⁰ In the late seventeenth century the vast majority of Europeans still accepted that the individual has no right to make up his or her own mind about the most important questions: to assert the emancipation of the individual in the most fundamental issues relating to society and morality as well as religion was still an unusually radical and quintessentially 'Spinozist' point of view.

De Hooghe and Walten, then, were both clearly Orangist republicans, something which earlier in the Dutch Golden Age would have been a virtual contradiction in terms. Indeed, modern historians have become so used to associating Dutch republicanism with the States-party-faction of Johan de Witt and the anti-Orangists that they have probably been misled by this – as indeed I myself was in writing my *Dutch Republic* – to the extent of not seeing the advent of a no less radical political theoretical tendency, albeit slightly later, on the Orangist side. Radical republicanism, then, had been a preserve of anti-Orangists but the international situation and in some respects the Dutch internal situation had greatly changed since Amsterdam's efforts to block William III's anti-French strategy in 1684-5, and still more with the onset of the Glorious Revolution, in 1688, with the result that supporting William III became the only logical position for committed republicans with democratic tendencies in the 1680s. Unlike earlier Dutch republicans Walten and De Hooghe were publicly declared and even ardent Orangists, avowed adherents of the Stadholder, but at the same time admirers of what De Hooghe calls 'de gelykheyd (...) in de gemeene besten' (equality in republics).³¹ Both writers believed that the purpose of the state was to serve what Spinoza had termed the 'common good' of the people, a whol-



Anonymus artist, *Romeyn de Hooghe* (c. 1645-1708) UB Amsterdam

ly secular conception stripped of all trace of theological content which is the forefather of the 'general will' introduced into French republicanism by Diderot and then Rousseau and which is termed by De Hooghe in his *Spiegel van Staat* (2 vols. Amsterdam, 1706) the 'algemeen belang' (general interest).³²

At the same time, both personalities were totally at odds with the attitudes of the strict Calvinist and Voetian supporters of the House of Orange and also clearly had strong and decidedly sceptical views about the Bible. Whether Walten and De Hooghe – who, as a boy, had been a pupil at the school of Franciscus van den Enden in the 1650s³³ – were also Spinozists in a more precise and comprehensive sense we may well never know. But Walten at least was certainly accused of being a 'Spinozist' and there are various hints that both may have been; furthermore, their general outlook may fairly be said to accord with a broadly Spinozist, democratic republican standpoint. Walten's 'groot tractaat' (big treatise) of Bible criticism which he began writing before, and laboured on during, the Bekker controversy (1691-4) and which, among other things, was intended to display what he considered to be his great command of the subject, has failed to survive – presumably being seized and destroyed by the provincial high court of Holland at the time of his arrest and imprisonment.³⁴

Walten was, in any case, a radical publicist and, like De Hooghe, a freethinker and in his own opinion, a knowledgeable philosopher.³⁵ While posing as a champion of Bekker he certainly did not seem to worry, as Bekker, Jean Le Clerc, Melchior Leydekker, and so many others did, about the spread of Spinozism in Dutch society which, in the view of many, including Bekker had now reached critical proportions. One of the most remarkable and important assessments of the status of Spinozism as a movement in Dutch society appears in Bekker's *Kort Begryp der algemeene Kerkelyke Historien* (1686), where he affirms that

men moet bekennen dat de gevoelens van Spinosa maar al te ver en te veel door alle oorden en orden van menschen verspreid en geworteld zijn; datse de hoven der grooten ingenomen, en verscheidene der beste verstanden verpest hebben; dat luiden van seer burgerliken wandel door de selve als godliix tot ongodisterye verrukt zijn. Waar door 't getal der genen onder de hand wast die den Godsdienst en geloofsbelydenisse niet dan om de voegelijkeyd en meer uit menschelijke dan godlike insigten plegen. En magh dat so voort gaan help God! Welk een knak wil sulx door den swaren val van sulken menigte menschen aan 't gebind van Gods Huis noch geeven!

(One has to admit that Spinoza's views have spread and become rooted all too far and too much in all parts and social orders, that they have infected many of the best minds, including among the residences of the great; and that people of very ordinary status have been brought enraptured by them as if by something divine to godlessness.

Meanwhile, as a result, the number of those increases who profess religion and religious doctrine only to conform, and more from human than divine considerations. And if that continues, God help us, what a blow through the heavy fall of such a mass of people will be given to the frame of God's House!)

Walten for certain and De Hooghe presumably, seemed to belong to the growing band of 'disciples of Spinoza' regarded by churchmen, and defenders of the spiritual, philosophical and political status quo, in the 1680s and 1690s, as the principal threat to society and religion in the Netherlands.³⁷ Walten claimed to possess university doctorates in theology and law as well as philosophy, and De Hooghe in law,³⁸ and both were undoubtedly relatively highly educated men, ranking prominently among those Dutch *esprits forts* of the time who refused to admit any criterion of truth other than the light of philosophical reason. If opponents scoffed at Walten's talk of 'philosophische redenen' and his claim to possess three doctorates,³⁹ and many complained of his combative style and 'dwalende en spotterige geest' (erring and mocking spirit), one had to admit, as Bekker did, 'that he was not unlearned',⁴⁰ even if it was only in bitter mockery that opponents styled him 'our philosopher'.⁴¹

Admittedly, Walten's and De Hooghe's vehement hostility to French absolutism and their branding Louis XIV in print 'een geveleeschten duyvel' (an embodied devil),⁴² as well as their general principle that all monarchical 'arbitraire of absolute macht' (arbitrary or absolute power) is from first to last illegitimate standing in total contradiction to both reason - 'the light of nature', and Scripture,⁴³ could be broadly concurred with in a republican Netherlands at war with Bourbon France. The same could be said for Walten's scathing remarks about the dethroned James II who, from 1689, he calls the 'Pretender' to the thrones of England, Scotland and Ireland. Nevertheless, there were features of Walten's political thought as expressed in his Glorious Revolution pamphlets which moderate Dutch republicans, as well as English constitutional monarchists, clearly regarded with a degree of unease. Even his pamphlets justifying William III's invasions of Britain and Ireland betray an unmistakably radical strain which clearly marks him off from the main body of English Whig and Dutch Orangist propagandists.

While he and De Hooghe derided the De Witt faction, or Loevesteiners, in Dutch politics, they seem to have done so less out of admira-

SPIEGEL van STAAT
DES
VEREENIGDE
NEDERLANDS.

Waar in

De Macht en 't Vry Bestier,

Van yder der Zeven Verbonde **PROVINCIE**N en haar
byzondere Steeden,

Zo in Rechten als Regeeringen werd ontvouwd.

Aanwyzende

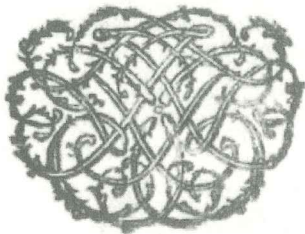
Aan, de In, en Uythceemfchen, alle de Hooge en Lage Recht-
banken, Collegien en Ampten, dewelke in de zelve, tot
dienft van den Staat, en het Recht, zyn ingefteld.

Hoe, wanneer en waar, voor de zelve yets te verrichten is.

DOOR

Mr: **ROMYN DE HOOGHE.**

EERSTE DEEL:



AMSTERDAM,

By **JAN TEN HOORN**, Boekverkooper 1706.

Romeyn de Hooghe, *Mirror of the State of the United Provinces*
(2 vols. Amsterdam, 1706) UB Amsterdam

tion of the monarchical element in the Dutch constitution, represented by the House of Orange and stadholderate, than opposition to what they regarded as the corrupt, anti-democratic character of the Holland patriciate and not least the ingrained economic and political particularism of the Amsterdam city government. Both men loudly accused the latter of nurturing treasonable sentiments towards the French and seeking only their own local commercial interests as well as a selfish desire to divert all trade into their own hands at the expense of other Dutch towns.⁴⁴ Romeyn de Hooghe also made a point of accusing the Amsterdam burgo-masters and city government of hypocritically claiming to uphold liberty while in fact stripping the common citizens of their city of their freedoms and privileges.⁴⁵ This type of 'Orangist democratic republicanism', in contrast to the Voetian and other non-democratic varieties of Orangism had already been inherent in Van den Enden's biting critique of the corrupt and selfish oligarchic habits of the Amsterdam city government, in the early 1660s and may also have had something in common with the criticism voiced by the reputedly libertine and 'atheistic' historian Lieuwe van Aitzema (1600-69).⁴⁶ In any case, in the years around 1688, with William III locked in deadly combat with Louis XIV and James II there was effectively no other recourse for a Dutch democratic republican than to support the Stadholder. To act as the Amsterdam city government did, in 1690, in opposing the Stadholder over the issue of the selection of the Amsterdam *schepenen* (magistrates), on grounds of Amsterdam's particular historic rights and privileges, was condemned by both Walten and De Hooghe as the height of narrow oligarchic self-interest and neglect of the 'general good'.⁴⁷

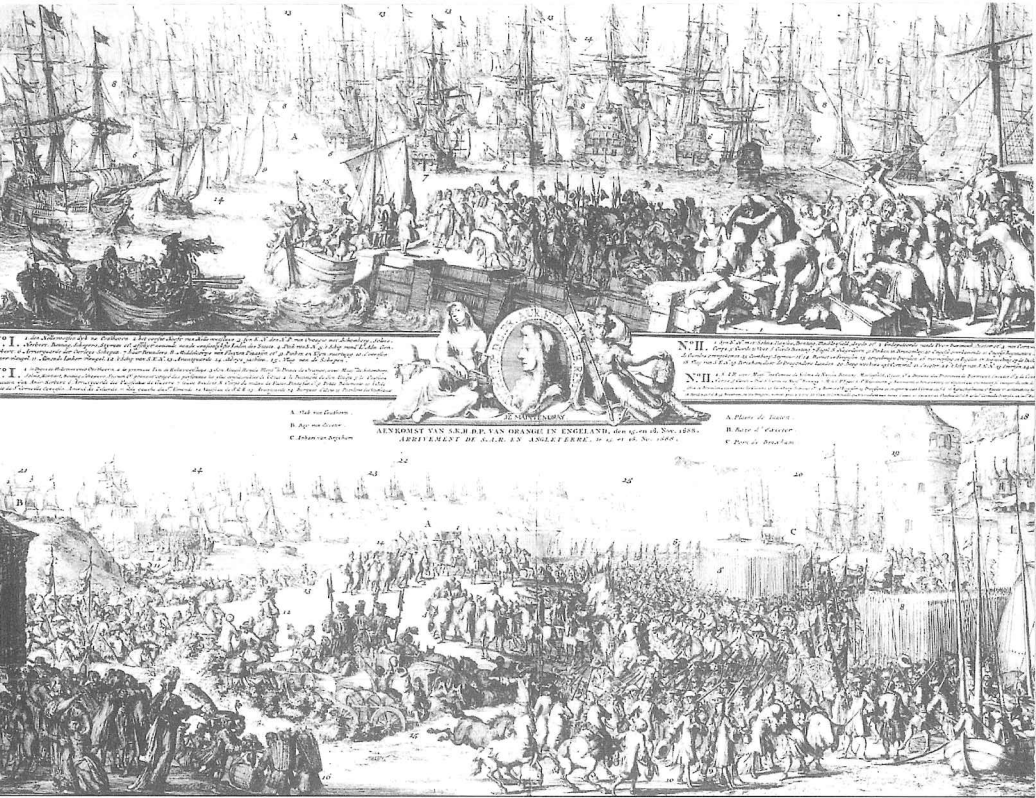
The chief targets of both writers' political propaganda were the principle of monarchy, on the one hand, and corrupt oligarchy, on the other. De Hooghe, echoing the Brothers De la Court in this respect, considered monarchy something inherently defective and at odds with the 'common good' which, for that reason, undermines itself.⁴⁸ Walten's and De Hooghe's democratic republicanism was evidently based on the inherently Spinozistic anti-contractarian, and anti-Hobbesian, claim that 'all men are by nature born free' and while an individual can sell, or surrender his own freedom, 'niemand kan de natuurlijke vrijheid van zijn nakomelingen verkopen, of weg geven' (no-one can sell, or give away the natural freedom of his descendants).⁴⁹ Both writers subscribe to the view that a people is always free and justified in taking up arms against a monarch whose rule it dislikes. Walten argued that neither Scripture nor 'the law of nature', justified the view that subjects owed 'passive' obedience to their prince irrespective whether he was 'good or bad' or whether monarchs 'sought to advance the empire of God, or that of the Devil, and vice and injustice in place of virtue and justice'.⁵⁰ Both writers expressly



Romeyn de Hooghe (after Charles Le Brun), *Satirical image of the Sun-King Louis XIV as Phaeton, being attacked by the Dutch Lion* (c. 1701-02) UB Amsterdam

justified the English rebellion against Charles I on account of the latter's despotic and unjust rule, comparing it to the Dutch Revolt against Philip II of Spain, who, as Walten puts it, 'sijn onwettige magt in de Nederlanden so lang oeffende tot dat de selve op een wettige manier de wapenen tegen hem opnamen' (exercised his unlawful power in the Netherlands for so long until the latter in a lawful manner took up arms against him) and Philip was forced to acknowledge some of the Netherlands provinces 'voor een vrye Republiek' (as a free republic).⁵¹

Equally, argued Walten, the Catholic Vasa, Sigismund king of Poland and 'Sweden' (1587-1632) had employed 'unlawful power' while the Swedish conspirators who unseated him had acted entirely lawfully in removing him and his heirs from the Swedish throne. Walten likewise explained the abdication of King Jan Kazimierz Vasa of Poland-Lithuania (ruled: 1648-68), in 1668, and his withdrawal to an abbey, in France, as the result of his seeking 'de regten en privilegien van sijn onderdanen door het oeffenen van een onbepaalde magt om verre te werpen' (overthrow the rights and privileges of his subject by exercising an unlimited power), provoking the Polish nobility to rebel and with every



Romeyn de Hooghe, *Arrival of His Highness the Prince of Orange in England, 1688*. UB Amsterdam

justification compel him to surrender his crown.⁵² For his part, De Hooghe, in his *Spiegel van Staat*, loftily scorns the princes of Italy for the repressive absolutism they had long aspired to impose and maintain which in his view amounted to their seeking only their own interest at the expense of that of their subjects and the common good.⁵³ According to Walten ‘de absolute of onbepaalde magt van een koning strijd niet alleen tegen het ligt der Natuur, maer ook tegen het geopenbaarde woord Gods’ (the absolute or unlimited power of a king conflicts not only with the light of Nature, but also with the revealed word of God), these being the sole criteria by which anything should be tested.⁵⁴

On the other hand, Walten and De Hooghe had no sympathy for the instigators (among them Bernard Mandeville) of the anti-Orangist riots in Rotterdam in the autumn of 1690 which in their opinion were the work of an ignorant mob stirred up by a few seditious and evil-intentioned persons.⁵⁵ Together with De Hooghe, Walten seems to have been involved in some murky intrigue on behalf of the Orangists side, in Rotterdam where he was then living and there is no doubt that he mortally offended various influential regents there no less than in Amster-

dam, Utrecht, and The Hague. Yet he also seems to have eventually fallen out of favour with the Stadholder-king, William III who, despite Walten's previous propagandistic services on his behalf, apparently made no great effort to protect him after 1692 or extricate him from prison after his incarceration in 1694.⁵⁶

Although both Walten and De Hooghe were clearly in accord with the passionate anti-monarchism of Johan and Pieter de la Court and the former brother's democratic sentiments, Walten also criticizes especially the latter for being the mouthpiece of Johan de Witt and the regent oligarchy, and refers to him in most cases rather disparagingly.⁵⁷ By contrast, he seems to have respected the politically highly astute Aitzema, as well as the Orangist republican Petrus Valckenier (1638-1712).⁵⁸ This perspective enabled him ardently to support the Dutch intervention in Britain, in 1688, and extol the Prince of Orange,⁵⁹ while simultaneously proclaiming, like De Hooghe, that peoples choose the form of state in which they live and can never lose their sovereign 'magt en regt' (might and right). Like the English radical republican Sir John Wildman, as well as John Toland and other British republicans, Walten and De Hooghe maintain that the people can never lose the right to repudiate any government which neglects to safeguard the laws and freedoms it was delegated to uphold.⁶⁰

Nor did Walten see the slightest difficulty in justifying a universal and wide-ranging 'right' of armed resistance to tyranny. Hence, kings, and for that matter all other forms of regime, he declares to be subject to the laws, and not above them, contending that 'not only may kings and regents be punished if they have deserved it, but that subjects may also always resist the latter, if they do something illegal, and attack them in their religion, freedoms or property'.⁶¹ For whoever has the 'power and right' to entrust an office to someone, also has the 'magt en regt' (might and right) to demand compensation and retribution where abuse of office, maladministration, corruption or tyranny damages the public interest.

All this is based on what Walten calls the 'natuurlijke vryheid des menschen' (natural freedom of the individual) and the 'law of nature', a term to which here and there he gives a Spinozistic twist by speaking of 'God's law, or the Law of Nature'.⁶² More remarkable still, this 'law of nature' in his political thought always prevails even in the case of church governance and the upholding of the public church. Thus Christians may know that the Bible is God's Law. But Muslims and heathens are equally convinced that the books of the Christians are merely 'Fabelen en Woorden der Menschen' (fables and the words of men) and they too have 'van Natuur het selve regt' (from Nature the same right) to proclaim the Koran of Muhammed canonical and command their preachers to abide

by its ordinances, for the law of nature is the only right which reason can recognize as applying universally.⁶³

Hobbes' idea that, once delegated, the people lose their sovereign right is altogether anathema to Walten and De Hooghe precisely as it is rejected by Spinoza and in the tradition of Spinozist political thought generally.⁶⁴ The most strikingly democratic element in Walten's political thought is the concept that the '*meerder getal* (majority) of a society or nation (not though of a city or particular place within it but the whole republic, or nation) always has *magt en regt*, to change (the form of) religion and Laws', and request the government to alter the laws to uphold the changed form of religion they have chosen.⁶⁵ In case of refusal, '*de meerder getal die het meerder getal uitmaken*' (those who constitute the majority), and have chosen another form of religion, have the '*magt en regt*' to compel the government to do so or set the government aside and choose a new regime.⁶⁶ Where the people set aside one set of government authorities and replace them, these '*door algemeene toestemminge daar toe moeten verkoren en gedeputeerd worden*' (must be chosen and delegated through general agreement) for the laws are on behalf of '*het meerder getal van een koningrijk, staat of republijk*' (the majority of a kingdom, state or republic) and are not instituted to promote the interests of any particular group or monarch.⁶⁷

For Walten and De Hooghe, monarchy is not just universally, inherently and always inferior to republics but is essentially an abusive affectation and fiction. In their political thought, the men in government, however constituted merely 'represent the whole people'.⁶⁸ Yet, clearly it was not Walten's political radicalism or attacks on the regent oligarchy but his outspoken attacks on ecclesiastical authority – and especially his vigorous espousal of the cause of the bitterly controversial Balthasar Bekker (1634-98) whom he says '*opregte liefhebbers van God en zijn waarheden, en van de rust en vrede der Kerke*' (upright lovers of God and his truths, and of the peace and tranquillity of the Church) should gladly support – which precipitated his unhappy fate.⁶⁹ His pamphlets during the Bekker controversy written in a hard-hitting, acerbic manner reveal a systematic strategy to subordinate theology, and theological modes of viewing the world, to 'reason' and the New Philosophy. They were pamphlets which could scarcely fail not just to antagonize but also outrage and goad the Reformed Church authorities.⁷⁰ He pushed his confrontation with the *predikanten* to such a point that eventually a head-on collision between Walten and the secular as well as the Reformed Church authorities became unavoidable.

In one of his most abrasive pamphlets supporting Bekker, of August, 1691, Walten asserts, with a typically provocative flourish, that 'since the light of a clear philosophy has illuminated this century', meaning



BALTHASAR BEKKER,
SACRO SANCTÆ THEOLOGIÆ
DOCT. ET VERBI DIVINI MINISTER.

Anonymus artist, *Balthasar Bekker* (1634-98) UB Amsterdam



BENEDICTUS_{DE} SPINOZA,
IUDÆUS ET ATHEISTA.
Natus Amstelod. MDCXXXII. D. 24. Nov
Denatus Hagæ Com. MDCLXXVII. D. 21. Febr.

Anonymus artist, *Benedictus de Spinoza* (1632-77) UB Amsterdam

Cartesianism (or possibly radical Cartesianism and Spinozism), theologians had begun to study Scripture 'met meerder neerstigheid' (with more diligence). Consequently, there had been a fundamental change in our way of interpreting the Bible and 'is het gedurig quellende monster van spook, toverij, schrik en vrese voor de Duyvel, eenigsins vermindert en by vele verdweenen' (the ceaselessly tormenting monster of spirits, sorcery, terror and fear of the Devil, has somewhat receded, and among some disappeared).⁷¹ It became Walten's abiding theme during the Bekker controversy that many sections of Dutch society were involved, including the governing regent class, and that what was afoot was an all-out war to the finish between reason and superstition in which the Reformed Church authorities, afraid of losing their power over the people,⁷² were ill-advisedly siding with the irrational,⁷³ accusing Bekker falsely,⁷⁴ and by persisting with their proceedings against him in the classes and synods, systematically and dangerously sowing dissension in the republic while the regents, he seemed to imply, while often aware of the truth of what was afoot, largely just stood by and neglected the public interest.⁷⁵

Among the most original and unsettling elements in Walten's writing was his constantly reiterated contention that if superstitious dread is one of the chief banes of mankind, it is rooted not merely in popular ignorance but the deliberate manipulation of popular credulity by the clergy and others for their own material interest. They exploit popular dread, and belief in demonology, he held, to enhance their authority and power. It was Bekker, declares Walten, who delivered the decisive blow to demonology so that 'nu moet het oude wangeloof, dat door de onwetenheyt en 't belang der geestelijkheid is voort gekomen, door de kragt der waarheyt verdwynen (now must the old superstition, that arose from ignorance and the self-interest of the clergy, disappear through the power of truth).'⁷⁶

Expressly setting the 'interest' of the clergy against the interest of the people, he accused the preachers of wanting to keep debates about the Devil in Latin so that the people should remain 'unenlightened'.⁷⁷ He denounced the Dutch Reformed *predikanten* as 'little popes over consciences' who whenever someone appears with a new method of study, or who reveals necessary truths, turn 'als een veelhoofdig monster' (as a many-headed monster) against him and throw him out of 'the synagogue'.⁷⁸ It was not Bekker, he claimed, but the preachers in their zeal to muzzle Bekker and suppress his ideas, with their ruthless manipulation of the *classes* and consistories to pressure the regents and public, who were responsible for the vast uproar and disturbance so agitating and distressing the public.⁷⁹ All the most 'philosophical' and 'reason-loving' regents in the towns, claimed Walten, were (at least privately) disgusted by the torrent of ranting anti-Bekker literature pouring from the pens of the Reformed preachers,⁸⁰ though opponents claimed that the professors and

students at the universities were also, in the main, opposed to Bekker.⁸¹

At the insistence of the Reformed Church authorities Walten was successfully isolated and suppressed. Yet it can hardly be said that he was suppressed in every respect. Surveying the Dutch intellectual and cultural scene, in 1695, in his introduction to the Dutch version of Wittichius' *Anti-Spinoza*, a Cocceian *predikant* declared somberly

wie Spinoza is geweest en wat ketterye hy heeft gevolgd? gelove ik niet dat aan yemand onbekend kan zyn. Syne schriften zyn over al te vinden, en worden in dese jeukerige eeuw om hare nieuwhed, by na in alle boekwinckels verkocht.

(Who Spinoza was and what heresy he followed, I do not believe can be unknown to anybody. His books are to be found everywhere and are, in this itchy age, owing to their novelty sold in nearly all book-shops.)⁸²

Still more remarkable are the preacher's words regarding the growing penetration of Spinoza's thought in society:

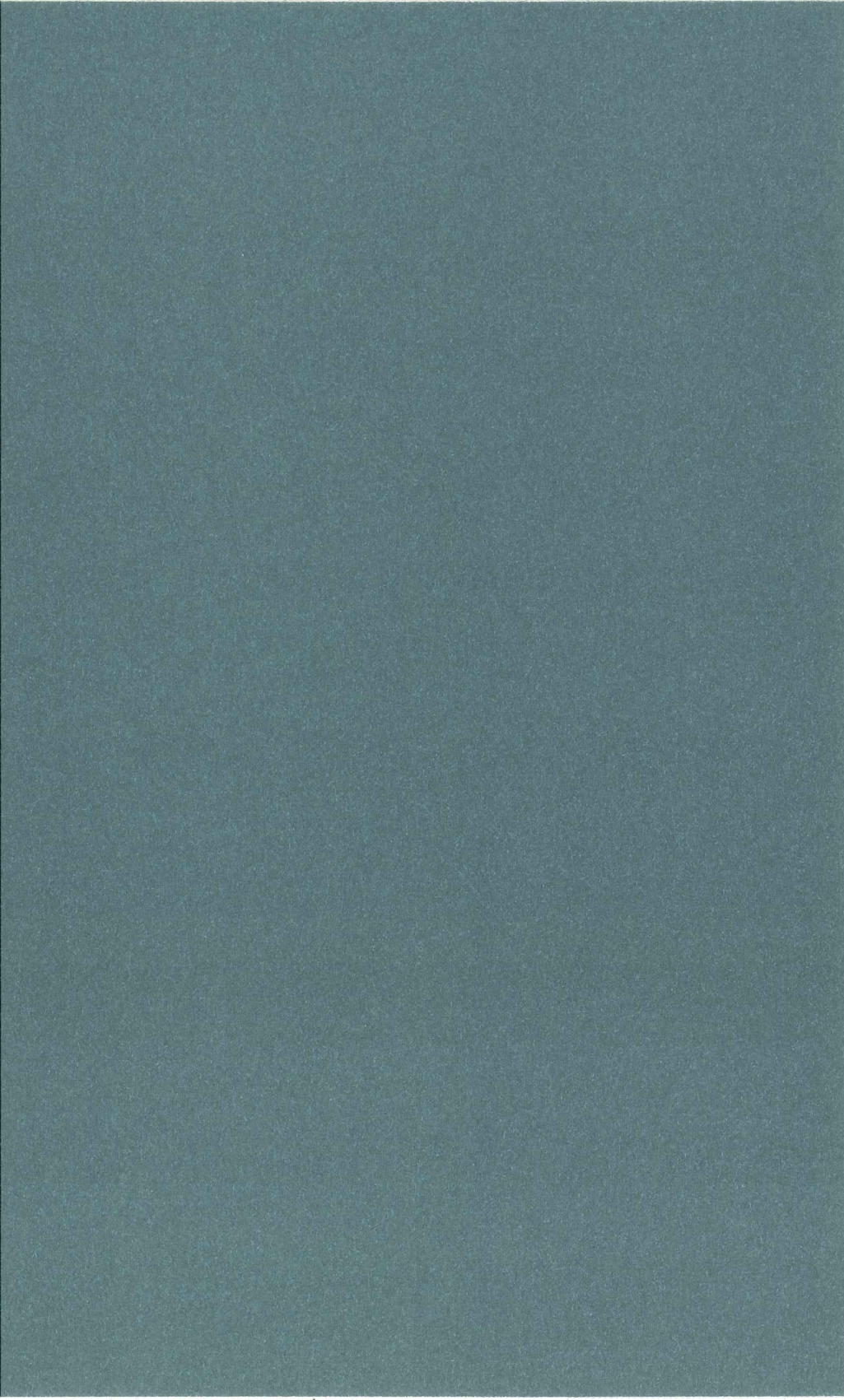
...en Spinoza heeft niet minder en vruchtbare meenigte van navolgers na gelaten, als de beste Griekse Sophist of wyffelaer, die volgens hare lichten aart en inborst, en alleen gedreven doorde kittelachtigheid van haar jeukerig verstand, en begeerte tot roem, enkel en eeniglyk toelleggen, om de verdervelyke leerstukken van haare nieuwe meester aan allen in te boesemen, en wyd en syds te verspreiden. Ook is het haar gelukt, want binnen een kleine tyd heeft sich dit venyn, by na door de meeste delen van de Chrystelyke wereld verspreid, en het groeid en kruipt noch dagelyks verder en verder.

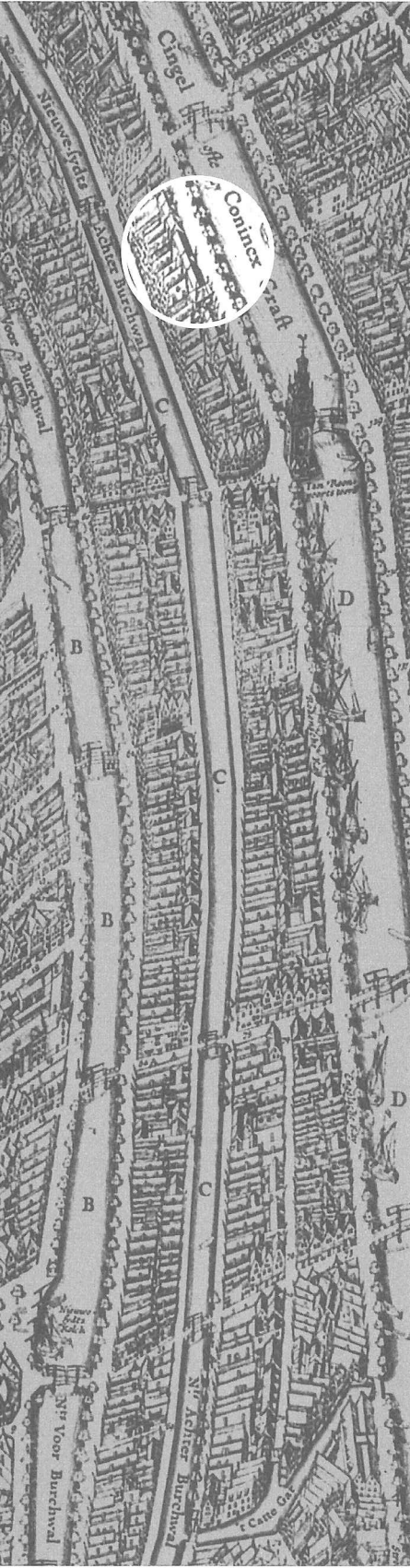
(And Spinoza left behind a no smaller and less prolific crowd of followers than the cleverest Greek Sophist, followers who, with their wanton nature and character and driven only by the tickling of their restless intellect, and desire for fame, aim solely and only at inculcating the ruinous doctrines of their new master into everyone, and spreading them far and wide. Furthermore, they succeeded, for within a short time this venom has spread almost through most parts of the Christian world and daily it grows and creeps further and further.)⁸³

The result was the advent within Dutch society of a totally new vision of society, morality, religious authority and not least politics – a vision exemplified, it seems to me by no-one more forcefully and insistently than Ericus Walten and the great engraver Romeyn de Hooghe.

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2. Kossmann, *Political Thought*, 60, 85-6, 182, 193; see also E.H. Kossmann, *Politieke theorie in het zeventiende-eeuwse Nederland* in section 'Letterkunde' of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Sciences proceedings, new ser. no. Ixvii, no. 2 (Amsterdam, 1960); E.H. Kossmann, *Politieke theorie en geschiedenis* (Amsterdam, 1987), pp. 211-33; E.O.G. Haitsma Mulier, *The Myth of Venice and Dutch Republican Thought in the Seventeenth Century* (Assen, 1980), pp. 120-209; in addition, see Hans W. Blom, *Morality and Causality in Politics: the Rise of Naturalism in Dutch seventeenth-century Political Thought* (n.p., 1995), pp. 157-246; Hans W. Blom, 'Politics, Virtue and Political Science: an Interpretation of Spinoza's Political Philosophy', *Studia Spinozana* 1 (1985), pp. 209-30; Hans W. Blom, 'The Moral and Political Philosophy of Spinoza', in G.H.R. Parkinson (ed.), *The Renaissance and Seventeenth-Century Rationalism. The Routledge History of Philosophy* iv (London, 1993), pp. 313-48.
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8. Kossmann, *Politieke theorie en geschiedenis*, 222.
9. B. de Spinoza, *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (Gebhardt edition 1925) trans. S. Shirley (Leiden, 1989), pp. 227-8.
10. B. de Spinoza, *Tractatus Politicus* in Wernham (ed.) *The Political Works* (Oxford, 1958), pp. 305, 364-5; Blom, *Morality and Causality in Politics*, 236.
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18. Van Bunge, 'Eric Walten', 41-54.
19. Christopher Brown, 'Tolerance and Art in the Dutch Republic', *Dutch Crossing* xx (1996), pp. 31, 33; Leemans, *Het Woord*, 73-4, 105, 150, 164.
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23. [Romeyn de Hooghe], *Postwagen-Praetjen tussen een Hagenaar, Amsterdammer beneficent, schipper en Frans koopman* (n.p., 1690), p. 5.
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27. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-17.
28. *Ibid.*, 'Opdracht' and p. 3; Van Bunge, 'Eric Walten', 43, 47.
29. Walten, *Onwederlegglyk Bewys*, 24.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
31. De Hooghe, *Spiegel van Staat*, i, 10.
32. *Ibid.*, i, p. 10 and ii, p. 57.
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 48. De Hooghe, *Spiegel van Staat*, ii, 12-13.
 49. Walten, *Regtsinnige Policye*, 24; Leonardus Ryssenius, *Dagon. Den Politiken Afgod verbroken voor des Arke des Heeren (...) tegen een Godslasterlijk schrift van eenen Ericus Walten* (The Hague, 1690), p. 2; Knuttel, 'Ericus Walten', 351.
 50. E.W[alten], *Wederlegginge*, 4.
 51. Ibid., p. 38; De Hooghe, *Spiegel van Staat*, i, 61-2 and ii, 54-5.
 52. E.W[alten], *Wederlegginge*, 39.
 53. De Hooghe, *Spiegel van Staat*, ii, 19-22.
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 66. Ibid.
 67. Ibid., p. 9.
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 78. Ibid., p. 9; Knuttel, 'Ericus Walten', 440.
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 80. [Walten], *Beschryvinge van een vreemd Nagt-Gezigte*, 10; Walten, *Brief Aan een regent*, 133; Knuttel, 'Ericus Walten', 405; Fix, *Fallen Angels*, 107.
 81. Florentius Costerus, *De Gebannen Duyvel weder in geroepen, ofte het vonnis van doctor Bekker over den duyvel gevelt* (n.p., n.d. [1691?]), pp. 1-2.
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 83. Ibid.





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